

## No Thank You, We Don't Believe in Socialization

by

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I can't believe I am writing an article about socialization, The word makes my skin crawl. As homeschoolers, we are often accosted by people who assume that since we're homeschooling, our kids won't be "socialized." The word has become such a catch phrase that it has entirely lost any meaning. The first time I heard the word, I was attending a Catholic day school as a first grader. Having been a "reader" for almost 2 years, I found the phonics and reading lessons to be incredibly boring. Luckily the girl behind me felt the same way, and when we were done with our silly little worksheets, we would chat back and forth. I've never known two 6 yr olds who could maintain a quiet conversation, so naturally a ruler-carrying nun interrupted us with a few strong raps on our desk. We were both asked to stay in at recess, and sit quietly in our desks for the entire 25 minutes, because "We are not here to socialize, young ladies." Those words were repeated over and over throughout my education, by just about every teacher I've ever had. If we're not there to socialize, then why were we there? I learned to read at home. If I finished my work early (which I always did,) could I have gone home? If I were already familiar with the subject matter, would I have been excused from class that day? If schools weren't made for socializing, then why on earth would anyone assume that homeschoolers were missing out?

As a society full of people whose childhood's were spent waiting anxiously for recess time, and trying desperately to "socialize" with the kids in class; It is often difficult for people to have an image of a child whose social life is NOT based on school buddies. Do you ever remember sitting in class, and wanting desperately to speak to your friend? It's kinda hard to concentrate on the lessons when you're bouncing around trying not to talk. Have you ever had a teacher who rearranged the seats every now and then, to prevent talking, splitting up friends and "talking corners". Were you ever caught passing notes in class? Now- flash forward to "real life." Imagine the following scenes:

\*Your Employer is auditing the Inter-Office Email system and comes across a personal note between you and a co-worker. You are required to stand at the podium in the next sales meeting to read it aloud to your co-workers.

\*The Police knock on your door, and announce that because you and your neighbor have gotten so close, they're separating you. You must move your home and your belongings to the other side of town, and you may only meet at public places on weekends.

\*You're sitting at a booth waiting for a co-worker to arrive for a scheduled lunch date. Suddenly, a member of upper-management sits down across from you and demands your credit cards. When your friend arrives, you just order water and claim you're not hungry, since he stole your lunch money.

\*You're applying for a job and in an unconventional hiring practice, you are made to line up with other applicants, and wait patiently while representatives from two competing companies take their pick from the lineup.

\*You're taking your parents out for an anniversary dinner. After you find a table, a waiter tells you that seniors have a separate dining room, lest they "corrupt" the younger members of society.

\*You go to the grocery store only to find that since you are 32 years old you must shop at the store for 32 year olds. It's 8 miles away and they don't sell meat because the manger is a vegetarian, but your birthday is coming up and soon you'll be able to shop at the store for 33 yr. Olds.

\*You'd like to learn about Aviation History. You go to the library and check out a book on the subject only to be given a list of "other subjects" that you must read about before you are permitted to check out the aviation book.

\*You're having a hard time finding what you need in the local department store. The saleslady explains that each item is arranged alphabetically in the store, so instead of having a section for shoes, you will find the men's shoes in between the maternity clothes and the mirrors.

\*Your Cable Company announces that anyone wishing to watch the Superbowl this year must log on a certain number of hours watching the Discovery Channel before they can be permitted to watch the game.

\*You apply for a job only to be told that this job is for 29 year olds. Since you're 32, you'll have to stay with your level.

\*In a group project, your boss decides to pair you up with the person you don't "click" with. His hope is that you'll get learn to get along with each other, regardless of how the project turns out.

These absurd examples were created to point out how absolutely ridiculous the idea of "socializing" in schools is. Many people had a friend who they stayed friends with all through grammar school- WHY? Because their names were alphabetically similar, and they always ended up in line with each other. As an adult, have you ever made friends with someone simply because your names were similar? How long would such a friendship last and how meaningful would it be, providing you had nothing else in common?

People often use the bully as an example of why it's so important to let kids "socialize" at school. If that's so important, then the bully needs to go to JAIL after a few months, because self-respecting society simply doesn't put up with that, nor should my 6 yr. old. Sure, there are crappy people in the world, but the world does a much better job of taking care of these things. A bullying brat in the first grade will still be a bullying brat in the 6th grade. He will still be picking on the same kids year after year after year, unless he moves to a new town. How long would the average adult put up with a bully? Personally, as an adult, I have only come across one grown up bully. I choose not to be around this miserable woman. So do many other people. THAT is real life. If she were a co-worker, I would find a different job. If she worked at a business I patronized- not only would I refrain from doing business with that company, I would write a letter to the bully, her manager, the owner and the main office. A kid in a classroom has no way to emotionally protect themselves against such a person. I would never expect my kids to put up with bad treatment from a bully in the name of "toughening them up." For what? So they can be submissive wimps when they grow up too? So they can "ignore" their miserable bosses and abusive spouses? In real life, if an employer discovered that an employee was harassing the other staff members, that employee could be fired (pending the 90-day evaluation) or relocated. In real life, if you are so dreadfully harassed by a co-worker you can seek legal recourse independently. In a classroom, the teacher and other children are often powerless.

The idea of learning acceptable social skills in a school is as absurd to me as learning nutrition from a grocery store. As Homeschoolers, the world is our classroom. We interact with people of all ages, sexes and backgrounds. We talk to and learn from everyone who strikes our interest. We use good manners in our home and I'm always pleased when others comment on the manners my children have picked up. I believe good manners to be an important social skill. Respecting common areas is also of value to us. We often carry a grocery bag with us on walks, in case we find trash that needs to be discarded. When we're waiting at a bus stop, if there is trash on the ground, we make a point to carry it onto the bus and discard it properly. Once, while waiting at a bus stop- we saw a grown man drop his popsicle wrapper on the ground. He was 2 feet from a trash can- My daughter looked up at me with eyes as big as saucers. I told her (out loud) "It must have blown out of his hand from that little wind, because no-one would throw trash on the ground on purpose. I'm sure when he's done with his popsicle, he will pick it up and throw it away correctly- otherwise, we can take care of it so we don't have an ugly world." He did pick it up, rather sheepishly. I can't imagine expecting my children to have a respect for the cleanliness of common areas in an environment where bathroom walls are covered in graffiti and trees are scratched with symbols of "love" of all things.

Another social skill we strive to teach our children is that all people are created equal. I can't imagine doing that in an environment where physically disadvantaged children are segregated into a "special" classroom. Or even children who speak a different language at home. They are segregated and forced to learn English, while never acknowledging the unique culture they were raised in, and not enabling the other students to learn FROM them. Learning, in school, comes from the books and teachers. We will learn Spanish from a BOOK, not from a Spanish-speaking student; and not until 7th grade.

I have never felt it would be beneficial to stick my 6-yr. old in a room full of other 6-yr. olds. I believe God created a world full of people of all ages and sexes to insure that the younger ones and older ones learn from each other. A few years ago, we were living thousands of miles from any older family members, so I brought my kids (then 5 and 2) to an assisted living facility, so they could interact with the elderly. Staff members told us that many of the older people would wake up every day and ask if we would be visiting soon. We always went on Wednesdays. My daughters learned some old show tunes while one of the men played piano and the others would sing along. If I didn't have to chase my 2-yr. old around, I would have had plenty of women ready to share the art of crocheting with me (something I've always wanted to learn.) If a friend were too sick to come out of their room during our visit, we would often spend a few minutes in their room. I always let them give the kids whatever cookies they had baked for them, and I ended up cleaning a few of the apartments while we visited, simply because I would have done the same for my own Grandmother. Every room had pictures from my kids posted on their refrigerators. We called this "Visiting the Grandmas and Grandpas" and my daughters both (almost 2 yrs later) have fond memories of our visits. I'm sure that if we were still visiting there, my unborn child would have a thousand handmade blankets and booties to keep him warm all winter.

I don't remember any such experiences in my entire School life, although I do remember being a bit afraid of old people if they were too wrinkly or weak looking. I never really knew anyone over 60. I never sped down the hall on someone's wheel-chaired lap, squealing as we popped wheelies and screeched around corners. I never got to hear stories about what life was like before indoor plumbing and electricity, from the point of view of a woman with Alzheimers, who might believe she was still 5 yrs old, talking with my daughter as if she were a friend. I never got to help a 90-yr. old woman keep her arm steady while she painted a picture. And I never watched a room full of "grandma's" waiting for me by the window, because we were 15 minutes late.

On a recent visit to an Art Gallery, we noticed a man walking back and forth, carrying framed artwork from his old pickup truck. I asked my 6 yr. old if she thought he might be the artist. We both agreed that was a possibility, and after a little pep-talk to overcome her stage fright, she approached him and asked. He was the artist, and he was bringing in his work to be evaluated by the curator. We all sat down and he explained some of his techniques and listened to her opinions about which piece she liked best. He told about how he enjoyed art when he was 6 and would "sell" pictures to family and friends. He recounted how he felt while creating a few of the pieces, and how each one has special meaning to him. He even let her know how nervous he was to show them to the curator and how he hoped she found them as interesting as we did. As he was called into the office, a group of thirty-four 3rd graders filed past, ever so quietly, while their teacher explained each piece on the walls. The children were so quiet and well behaved. They didn't seem to mind moving on from one picture to the next (The problem with homeschoolers is they tend to linger on things they enjoy). They didn't seem to have any questions or comments (Maybe they'll discuss that later in class). And they never got a chance to meet the gentleman in the pickup truck. I hope my kids aren't missing out on any "socialization."